

Saving the Bali starling

The jalak bali is a beautiful white bird with blue decorative skin around the eyes. As an endemic species of Bali symbolizing purity and chastity, it is also called the Bali mynah, the Bali starling, Rothschild's mynah and the Rothschild starling. Scientifically named *Leucopsar rothschildi* Stresemann, the Balinese call it curik bali or jalak bali. The bird was first discovered in 1911 by German ornithologist Erwin Stresemann in the northwestern part of Bali.

As monitored by a team of the Association of Bali Mynah Conservationist (APCB) and Ecosystem Control officers at Brumbun Bay Resort, West Bali National Park (TNBB), the birds like to flock together with sri gunting (ashy drongo), because these song birds are more aggressive toward eagles, which are the natural enemies of curik bali.

Curik bali's presence in the forest attracts attention, with its white feathers making it easy to spot. To avoid detection by eagles, they often perch on branches of pilang (Acacia trees), which have white bark that can camouflage them.

For the protection of curik bali in nature, in 2004 the APCB, whose members comprise executives of zoos in Indonesia, the Forestry Ministry, bird researchers from the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) and members of the Indonesian Wildlife Conservation Forum (Foksi), conducted a survey in the TNBB to ascertain the causes of world agencies' failure in curik bali conservation.

It turned out that the failure was due to illegal logging and curik bali poaching, while the park itself was under threat and unable to optimally support the threatened species.

"Since 2004, we've been trying to encourage the captive breeding of this endangered species by involving local people in conservation activities, which is backed by a Forestry Ministry decree permitting the public, particularly the community around the TNBB, to keep and breed curik bali," said the head of the APCB, Tony Sumampau, when monitoring the birds in the park in Gilimanuk, Bali.

In 2007, captive breeding activities in the TNBB area spread. The price of a curik bali was initially about Rp 15 million (US\$1,310), which later decreased to Rp 6 million. The birds bred under such conditions are not considered ideal due to having been inbred. For better genetic quality, the APCB has sought new stock and collected 96 bird samples tested by LIPI specialists.

LIPI curik bali researcher Noerdjito said the birds could be genetically improved in captive breeding. Fledglings should be selected for cross breeding to obtain the best offspring. However, the birds are generally released without this happening.

"I've repeatedly notified the TNBB of the need to select the young curik bali, but the message may not have been properly received due to frequent post transfers, while the birds kept in several zoos in Indonesia should also be cross-bred for their best broods," explained Noerdjito.

Besides the Ainun Yaqqin Foundation being located some 4 kilometers from the TNBB, 17 curik bali breeders also live in Sumber Kalmpok village, Buleleng regency.

They belong to the Curik Bali Conservationists Group (KPCB) of Manuk Jegeg. Based on a consensus between the breeders and the APCB, 10 percent of the birds bred are released.

However, the breeders are disappointed by the difficulty in securing a license to sell curik bali.

"We breed curik bali the same way we raise our cattle. We appeal for distribution license facilitation to enable us to sell the birds and buy insects and fruit for the young broods. We applied for a license from the Natural Resources Conservation Agency [BKSDA] a year ago but have had no response," said Gusti, a breeder from Sumber Klampok.